

Communication Evaluation of the *ASB Policybrief Series*

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Christina Ballew

Intern for ICRAF - SE Asia

Executive Summary

This Evaluation examines the *ASB Policybriefs* Series, a communications initiative coordinated by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) that disseminates experiences at the local and national levels based on scientific studies, and concentrates efforts on informing the lessons learned to an international audience. The ASB Partnership aims to bridge knowledge with action through affective and scientifically proven strategies. It also strives to inform the global debate on sustainability issues at the tropical forest-agriculture margins. For this reason, ICRAF is interested in measuring the influence of the *ASB Policybriefs* in addressing key issues between livelihoods and conservation (salience), providing valid scientific evidence (credibility) and whether it is sufficient in meeting the agenda of its target audience (legitimacy).

The study entails a brief literature review of past documents related to the *Briefs* as well as an online survey encompassing 10 questions, which was sent to the ASB Network. Overall, the results provide a small discussion on the relevance of the satisfaction and benefits obtained from the *ASB Policybrief* Series.

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1. Introduction

The Alternatives to Slash and Burn (ASB) Program originated in 1994 as a consortium of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) focusing on the Humid Tropical Forest Margins. It is coordinated by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), one of the 15 centres of the CGIAR, which brings together local knowledge, policy perspectives and science to understand the tradeoffs associated with different land uses. It also examines the roles of markets, regulation, property rights and rewards with the overarching goal to raise productivity and income of rural households without increasing deforestation or undermining essential environmental services.¹ Of recent interest within the ASB consortia relates to topics on climate change mitigation and adaptation, reducing carbon emissions by storing carbon (REDD+), and promoting sustainable development.

This global partnership now incorporates more than 90 institutions of international and national-level research, non-governmental organizations, universities, community organizations, farmers' groups and other local, national and international organizations. The Partnership aims to identify innovative strategies, approaches and tools to translate international agreements into instruments helping to change behavior and build capacity of those involved. In addition, ASB focuses on the international public goods aspects through the comparative studies of sites and through work with National Agricultural Research Systems. The Partnership provides examples of how poverty alleviation, community stabilization, and environmental protection objectives can be brought together in an integrated fashion.²

As a means to communicate this knowledge, the ASB Program over the past 20 years has invested in a series of *Policybriefs* that disseminates experiences at the local and national levels based on scientific studies, and concentrates efforts on informing the lessons learned to an international audience. The *ASB Policybriefs* do not tell policymakers what to do, but rather report on small steps in the processes of change with the intention to support dialogue and point out existing controversies and uncertainties. The potential to reach such an audience is significant since weak institutions and perverse or ineffective policies are often the main blockages to implementing change.³

Upon the 20th Anniversary of the ASB Program, the ICRAF - SE Regional Office has initiated this Evaluation to examine the levels of impact and contributions of the *Brief Series* for its target audience. In general, it aims to understand the perceptions of its members in addressing key issues as well as whether the topics and themes presented in the series relates to the audience work agenda. Therefore, this report evaluates the communication effectiveness of the *ASB Policybrief Series* through three areas of measurement:

- 1) **Salience:** are the policy briefs addressing key issues in the debates on the interaction between communities' livelihood and conservation at the tropical forest margins?
- 2) **Credibility:** have the policy briefs provided sufficient scientific evidence, or links to details of the evidence available?
- 3) **Legitimacy:** are the policy briefs accepted by the target audiences as sufficiently respectful to their agenda?

Methodology

Firstly, the Evaluation begins with a desk top study of relevant documents associated with the ASB Program as well as a review of the *Brief Series*. It examines the history of the briefs, the target audience, its purpose and the desired outcomes.

Secondly, in order to measure the performance of the *Policybriefs*, the Evaluation conducts a qualitative survey based on the relevant themes represented in the *Briefs* in order to measure the salience, credibility and legitimacy of the Series. There were a total of 10 questions sent via SurveyMonkey to the ASB Listserv.

Unfortunately, this Evaluation was not able to obtain interviews with neither selected target audience recipients nor ASB Staff members set in the original *Terms of Reference* due to limited time and capacity. Nonetheless, the survey results will hopefully contribute insight on outcomes/impacts of the *Briefs* as well as provide scope to further outreach efforts.

Conclusion

Overall, the Evaluation seeks to understand the *ASB Policybriefs* target audience as well as measure the performance levels and impacts, which will help ASB Partnership and ICRAF to direct future outreach initiatives and recognize its contributions.

2. Literature Review

This section examines the literature surrounding the *ASB Policybriefs* in regards to its history, purposes, target audience, and desired outcomes. Significant to this examination is the *Report of the External Review of the Systemwide Program on ASB* that was conducted in 2006 by a Science Council Panel with a supplementary *Science Council Commentary*. Also of significance is the report on the *Impacts of the ASB Research (2006-2009) on the Policy-Science Community: Scoping Study through a Citation Analysis*.

Policy & Policy Briefs

A Policy Brief, in general, is a short document presenting findings and recommendations of research projects to a non-specific audience but often targeted to government officials, bureaucrats, donors, and/or development practitioners. It seeks to address a certain issue or a particular question that requires a decision to be made and is often a vehicle for providing policy advice. It is also useful for broader advocacy initiatives as there is often a gap between research and policy when trying to implement change. ⁴

As Policy Briefs attempt to paint a picture that is easy to follow and by explaining what has already been done and providing lessons learned, the author is able to recommend future options. The results, therefore, often describe what a researcher thinks will happen in a particular scenario and may allocate precise steps convincing the audience of urgency and impetus for action.

ASB Policybrief Purpose & Audience

In alignment with the above definition, the ASB Partnership describes their *Policybrief Series* as being designed to act as vehicle for distilling lessons derived from experience at the local and national level for the broader, international audience.⁵ The *Briefs* seek to integrate environmental and developmental perspectives by combining biophysical knowledge with insights to the social and economic realm. It hopes to deliver information to decisions makers to help reduce poverty. More specifically it aims to bridge knowledge with action through affective strategies of communication and awareness building.⁶ Over the course of 20 years since the creation of the ASB, 42 *Policybriefs* have been disseminated.

According to the *2006 External Review*, the *Briefs* are described as an innovative analytical method with a holistic, multidimensional approach to assessing land use options, which are often adopted by institutions with policy advisors in government. Also, the *Briefs* allow others to plan activities and inform global debate on sustainability issues at forest-agriculture margins which promote and target the communication of results to particular decision makers.

As the *Briefs* aim to influence the “world of action”, they are simultaneously targeted for a large audience that is often focused in the policy community and international policy arena: local people, bureaucrats, donors, public opinion leaders, development practitioners and scientists to achieve sustainable forest management.

From 2006-2009 it was noted that most work centered on providing tools for better understanding of trade-offs between carbon storage and environmental services. And since 2007, most ASB outputs focused on information dissemination and public awareness rather than specific policy changes. By 2009, the ICRAF coordination office underwent a transition period that allocated more focus on the REDD+ and AFOLU programs collaborating with IFPRI (international Food Policy Research Institute). From then on, there was an average of 2 briefs published per month.

Outcomes

Ideally, the potential benefits and outcomes deriving from the *Briefs* would be observable through public policy action. It is believed that the interexchange of information as well as the differences in the scope of influence among actors has the ability to produce positive feedback loop effects on behavioral shifts.⁷ Furthermore, information and experiences derived from one benchmark site may trigger policy makers of neighboring countries to reexamine their approaches to sustainable development. This could then lead to changes in national policy agendas. Specifically, the probable impact of the *Briefs* would have the policy arena recognize the importance of global environment services with the great potential to reward poor people. However, most of these conceivable attributes and changes are quite difficult to measure and so far, little research has been done on the direct impacts and outcomes from the briefs.

The first basic impact study, as mentioned, was the *2006 External Evaluation*⁸. This report assessed the *Policybrief* impact through a short survey that was sent to the ASB listserv. Out of 69 respondents, the audience consisted of the following: policy maker or advisor (13%), practitioner (21%), researcher (51%), student (7%), other (7%). Three quarters of those responding saw the policies briefs as relevant (21% excellent, 51% very good), and credible (20% excellent, 54% very good) - more than a third reported using briefs in the work (27%-44%, mean 35%). In addition, one fifth of respondents felt the Briefs influence beliefs and behaviours of key players in the ASB domain.

The *2006 External Evaluation* was able to obtain some key examples of the *Policybrief* impacts which included: debunking myths of deforestation and water management, legitimizing agroforestry practices in Cameroon, clarifying causes of forest burning in Indonesia, simplifying regulations in Brazil, clarifying land tenure of community agroforests in Indonesia, and making a case for including land use options in debates over Clean Development Mechanisms with international climate change negotiations context.

The *2006 External Evaluation* noted that the ASB Matrix tool discussed in *PolicyBrief #5*, had been utilised by the World Bank and the FAO, employed by the UNDP-GEF in a 7 year Brazil project, and used in Sumatra Forestry research and national park boundaries. The *Review* emphasized the adoption of the ASB Matrix to improve understanding of complex multidisciplinary, multi stakeholder interactions as well as helping NRM practices leading to income and environmental benefits.

The *ASB 2010* study, through a citation analysis, has significant measurements of impacts as well outputs. Overall, this metric assessment found that there were high numbers of Policy Brief citations in science institutes, although there were low citations from policy institutions.

The *Policybriefs* and ASB publications were acknowledged and recognized as credible sources, but it was noted that often issues lie with the sources not using science as major source of information.

Some citations that were significant to the policy sector were from the UNFCCC, World Bank, IPCC and WRI. Also measured were the number of internet downloads of the *Policybriefs* during 2006-09 with a total of 14,352 downloads. Yet, through these findings, it was concluded that there was little impact on the policy community.

Implications

One of the key implications from the *2006 External Review* relates to the difficulty of measuring impacts. It was noted that some decision makers didn't know what ASB was but rather acknowledged the partner institutions and projects involved.

In addition, a significant concern from the *2006 Review* stressed the absence of not only data but evidence of tracking outputs related to new technologies and policy reforms; plus, there was no strategy for assuring the technology and policy reform outputs produced are being targeted to appropriate audiences beyond the immediate circle of ASB research community. They argue for the tracking and targeting to be an important component of the Program wide strategy for translating research results into action and providing feedback on ASB recommended paths to innovation and action.

The *Impact Pathways* (2004) Report also had some concern with the gaps between outputs, outcomes and potential impacts. It suggested that ASB should examine these linkages and consider ways to strengthen them so as to achieve the maximum potential impacts especially as Policy Briefs usually depend on strategic forms of propagation and dissemination to reach target audience.

Furthermore, the *2010 Study* stressed several concerns regarding this lack of outcome and audience focus. It argued that that information produced by ASB was not being proactively and strategically delivered to some relevant decision makers, especially those at the local and regional levels. While publication distribution lists are useful for the mass delivery of prepared documents, ASB lacks control over whether the information is read, interpreted, and incorporated into policies and reflected by local activities. It is passive in identifying and targeting potential private businesses, regional and global, for forming multi-sector partnerships in tropical agroforestry development. Instead, partnerships have been initiated by the private sector. The lack of inclusion of such decision makers decreases the impact ASB has on linking local farmers to the global market places. Finally, ASB's impact on general public awareness of forest management practices is indirect and limited as mass media channels have not been fully explored and exploited.

In a follow-up to the *2006 Review*, the Science Council Commentary produced a document that further supports the need for better management of outreach, outcome measurement and "on-the-ground impacts specific technology and policy interventions." There is no mechanism for tracking of what technologies are showing most promise and targeting its technology and policy outputs into action and impact.

Suggestions from these documents include the importance of getting more specifically involved in the development end of the research. It suggested that ASB should consider a more pro-active and inclusive approach particular in following three areas: 1) moving their knowledge and know-how into practice; 2) put in effort devoted to addressing development goals vs. conservation goals; and 3) effort devoted to providing global public goods versus regional and local ones.

Significantly, this approach of ‘accountability for the contribution of research results to development outcomes’ was put in place through the CGIAR reform and is still relatively new (2013). CGIAR places much effort and focus on implementing the research programs⁹. Thus, it is important to monitor how this approach will affect the *Brief Series*’ ability to have substantial impact on the policy and decision making sector.

To note, although the *2010 Impact Study* was a way forward in measurements of *ASB Policybrief* impacts, it only examines quantitative indicators in the publication citations which relates to productivity of scientists rather than outcomes. There still remains a challenge with the impact on policy making and policy sectors. Pino (2010) recommends the need to devise a publication strategy to address different audiences through target driven forms and stresses for research on policy needs, issues and demands. Significantly, Pino advocates the need to develop explicit surveys among main policy brief audience to value the impact on the policy community as well as measuring the influence of web media, conferences and workshops on the policy sector.

Conclusions

As both the 2006 Review and 2010 Study advise, there is a great need to explore the qualitative measurement and analysis of the *ASB Policybrief* impacts. Therefore, a survey was sent to the ASB target audience to measure the performance and contributions of the *Brief Series*. The results are depicted in the next section.

3. Survey Results

The following section presents the results of the 10 question survey sent to the *ASB Policybrief* targeted audience via SurveyMonkey.com. Although the survey only received a small response rate, the data provides a small lens through which to view the communications approach of the *ASB Brief Series* through measurements of salience, legitimacy and credibility.

Response Rate

The survey was sent to 1354 email recipients from the ICRAF Nairobi Headquarters ASB Listserv. Over a two week period, the survey collected only 36 responses. There were over 100 emails not sent through as they were blocked due to the following issues:

- A problem occurred during the delivery of this message to this e-mail address
- Your message wasn't delivered due to a permission or security issue. It may have been rejected by a moderator, the address may only accept e-mail from certain senders, or another restriction may be preventing delivery
- The e-mail address you entered couldn't be found

Other reasons provided for the lack of response were due to out of office replies and change of email addresses. One particular respondent noted the following:

- As much as I would like to assist in the evaluation, unfortunately, our institute has not been getting the *ASB Policybriefs*. This is therefore making it difficult for me to assist.

Despite the small number of responses there were two audience members who noted:

- I just filled my survey. I hope we can learn the results of this interesting evaluation.
- Looks an interesting survey

Now, the subsequent sections are the results derived from the Survey based from 36 participants.

Current Work Position

According to Figure 1.1, the majority of the respondents are researchers (53%) with less than a quarter identifying as NGO employees (19%) or private sector employees (17%). Other respondents indicated they are development workers (11%) policy makers/advisors (11%) or government sector employee (3%). Other positions noted were independent consultant (12%), student (3%) and engineer (3%).

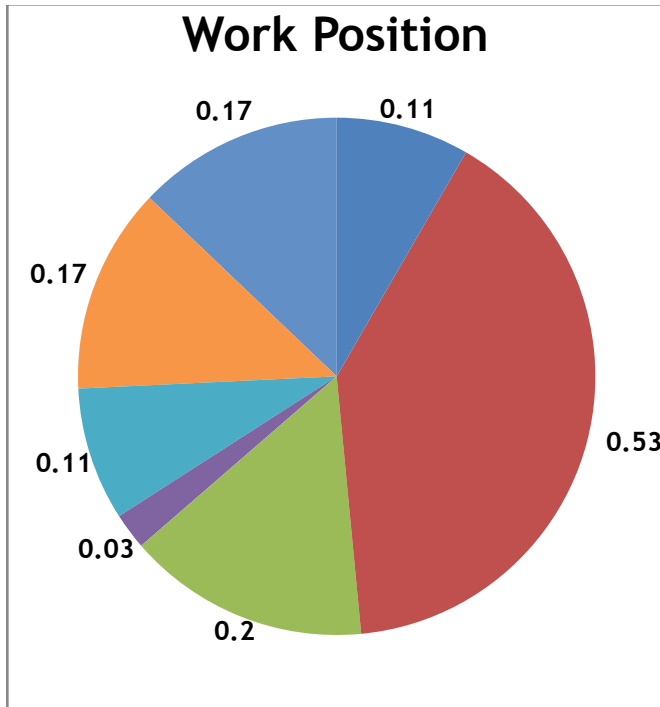


Figure 1.1 - Work Position

Location of work

The survey participants indicated they work in the following countries/areas:

Globally/internationally x 7	Brazil x 2	Mexico x 1
Indonesia x 6	Africa x 2	Morocco x 1
United States x 4	Malaysia x 2	Seychelles x 1
Peru x 5	Philippines x 2	New Zealand x 1
SE Asia x 4	UK x 2	Uganda x 1
Kenya x 3	Colombia x 1	Japan x 1
China x 2		

Key Objectives in Work

According to Figure 1.2, the majority of the respondents work in areas of market land-use/natural resource management (67%), climate change mitigation/adaptation strategies (67%), REDD/Carbon markets (61%) and sustainable (green) development (50%) and ecosystem services (50%).

Over a third engage issues of food security (42%), capacity building (39%), biodiversity protection/habitat quality (39%) and governance issues (31%) while just over a quarter of the survey participants (28%) examine property rights/land tenure issues, large-scale agriculture/plantation issues, environmental advocacy/conservation and gender.

Other areas that respondents focus on in their work are timber markets/forest products (22%), illegal logging or forest management (19%), financial transparency/accountability (14%), corruption (14%) and taxes/subsidies (3%).

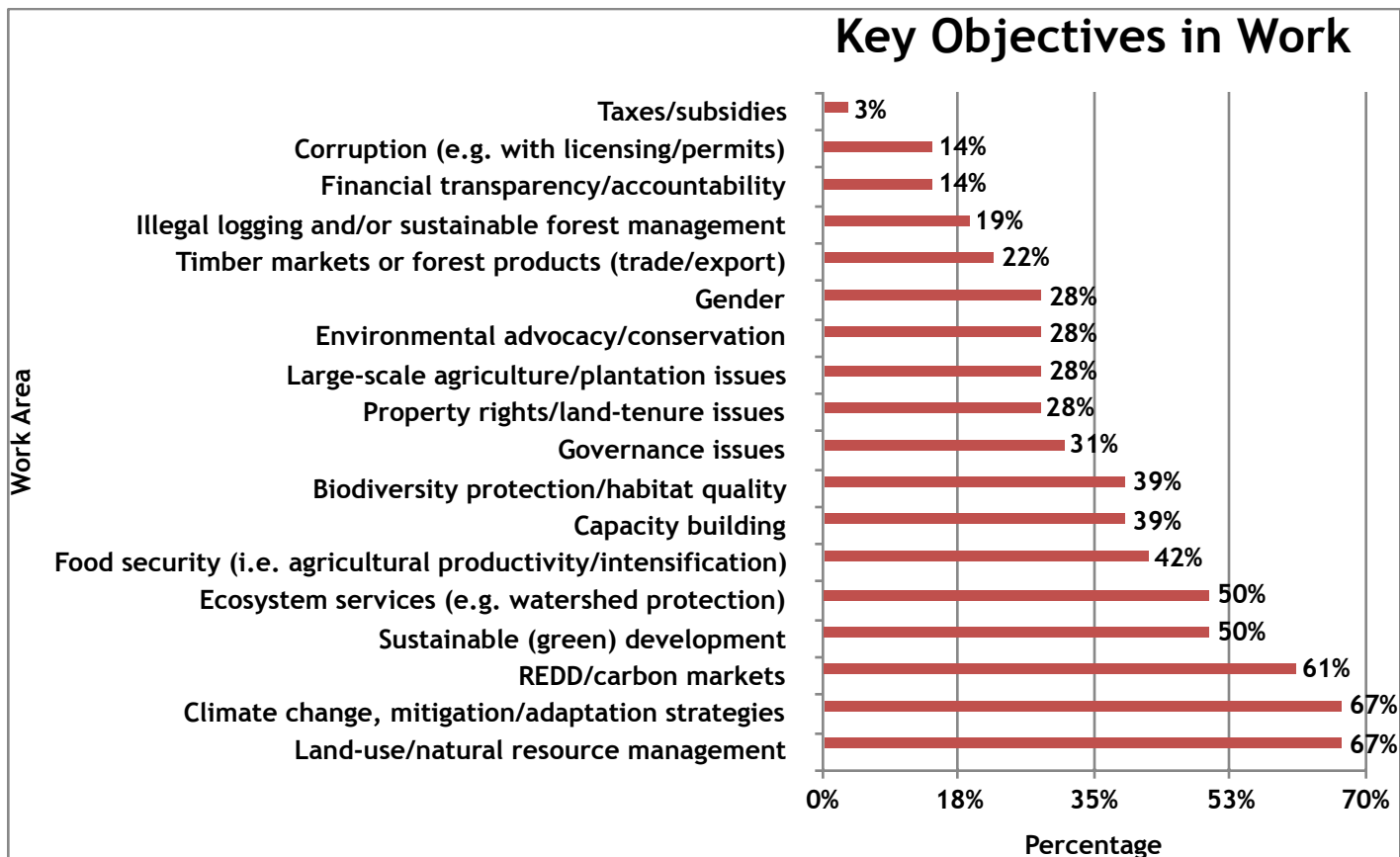


Figure 1.2 - Key Objectives in Work

Frequency of Reading

In relation to how often the audience reads the *Policybriefs*, the following responses were given:

Regularly x 5	Monthly x 2
Often x 3	Bi-monthly x 4
Occasionally x 6	Annually x 4
When I get copies of the briefs x 4	I have read half of the briefs x 1
I have read very few x 1	Not now, I used to read ASB Policybriefs x 1
I don't think I've read one before but looked at them when I got an email asking me to take this survey. I will read them regularly now because they look excellent.	

Access

More than half (54%) of the respondents access the *Policybriefs* from downloading it off the web while 34% receive the leaflets at conferences and the other third (31%) received it from the newsletter.

Satisfaction Aspects

Observed in Figure 1.3, almost all survey participants are satisfied with the readability (86%) while most are satisfied with the relevance of case studies (74%), figures that are readable and understandable (72%), structure of the *Briefs* (72%), quality of scientific research (67%) and key findings/ implications that are applicable to work agenda (64%). Less than half were somewhat satisfied with the *Policybriefs* being able to provide effective strategies that are implementable (42%) and references to other scientific material (39%) although almost half were still more than satisfied with these aspects.

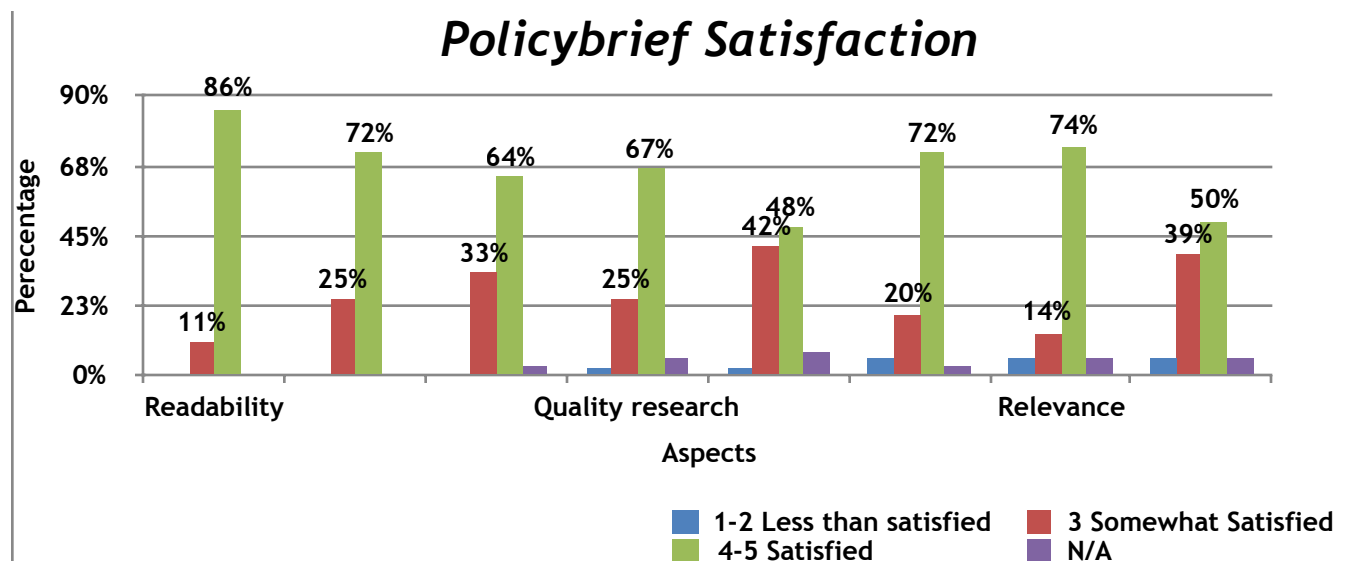


Figure 1.3 - Policybrief Satisfaction

Benefits

Respondents were asked to rate their level of benefits directly received from the *PolicyBriefs* where 1 was the least benefit and 5 was the most benefit. According to Figure 1.4, around half of respondents benefited most from obtaining multidisciplinary/multifunctional perspectives of complex situations (56%) and improved local livelihoods (50%), providing tools and scientific methods (e.g. MRV) to empower local communities (47%), building shared understanding to improve land-use planning with a diverse range of actors (47%), defining boundaries and mapping forest areas (e.g. recognizing forest frontiers/boundary zones) to improve spatial awareness (47%), and ability to facilitate and negotiate multi-stakeholder processes (42%). In addition, more than a third (39%) of the respondents indicated that they received the most benefits with implementing Payment for Ecosystem Services and transforming degraded or mono-cultural landscapes into diversified, productive systems (i.e. understanding and implementing agroforestry).

More than half of respondents somewhat benefited from decreased amount of deforestation because of better forest management, increased efforts to protect primary forests (i.e. conservation awareness), procuring initiatives/projects to increase carbon storage and understanding the value chain of forest products.

Important to note is that the majority of respondents indicated NA for providing better access to investments/credit for smallholder farmers (31%) and improving market accessibility for non-forest timber and/or non-timber products (33%).

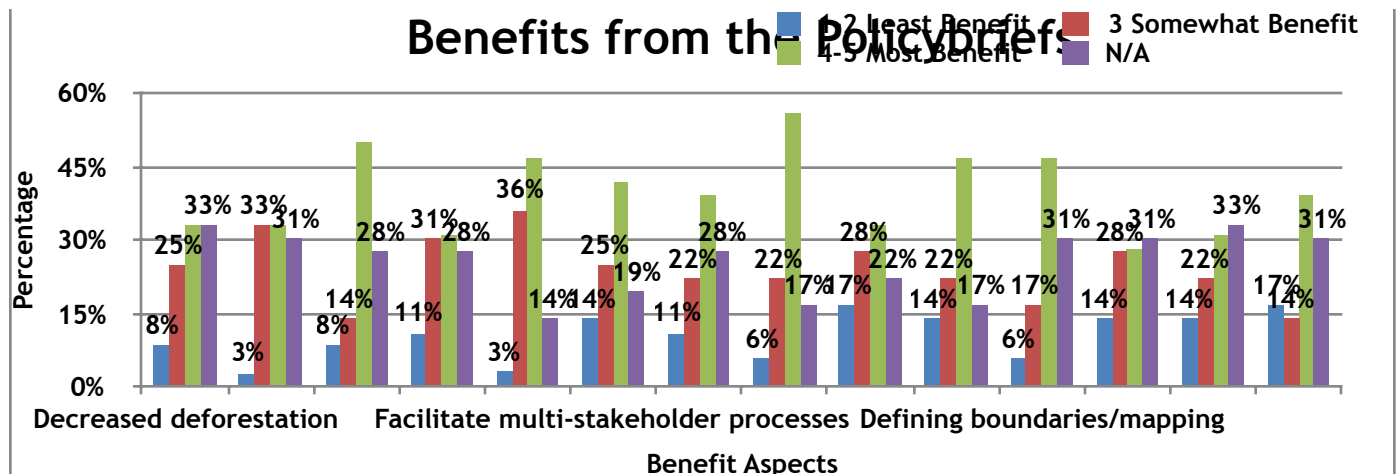


Figure 1.4 - Benefits from the *Policybriefs*

Approaches, Methods, Tools and/or Innovations Utilised

Respondents were asked to indicate the approaches, methods, tools and/or innovations associated with *ASB Policybrief* that are utilized in their work. Referring to Figure 1.5, the majority of respondents indicated their use of PES- Payments for Ecosystem Services (47%) and REALU- Reducing Emissions from All Land Uses (42%). A third (31%) employ the ASB Matrix while a quarter utilize NAMA- Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (25%), CER- Certified Emissions Reduction (25%), negotiation support tools (22%) and FALLOW- Forest, Agroforest, Low-value Land or Wasteland simulation model (22%). One fifth (17%) of respondents use AFOLU- Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Uses Accounting Scheme, LAAMA- Locally Appropriate Adaptation and Mitigation Actions, Scenario simulation games (hypothetical situations) and LUWES- Land-use Planning for Low-emissions Development Strategies.

Other uses were the Abacus SP Software (11%), REFSA- Research for Social Advancement (8%), RaCSA- Rapid Carbon Stock Appraisal (8%), FERVA- Fair and Efficient REDD Value Chains Allocation (6%) and EET- Emissions Embodied in Trade (3%). One respondent indicated the use of NAP/NAPA.

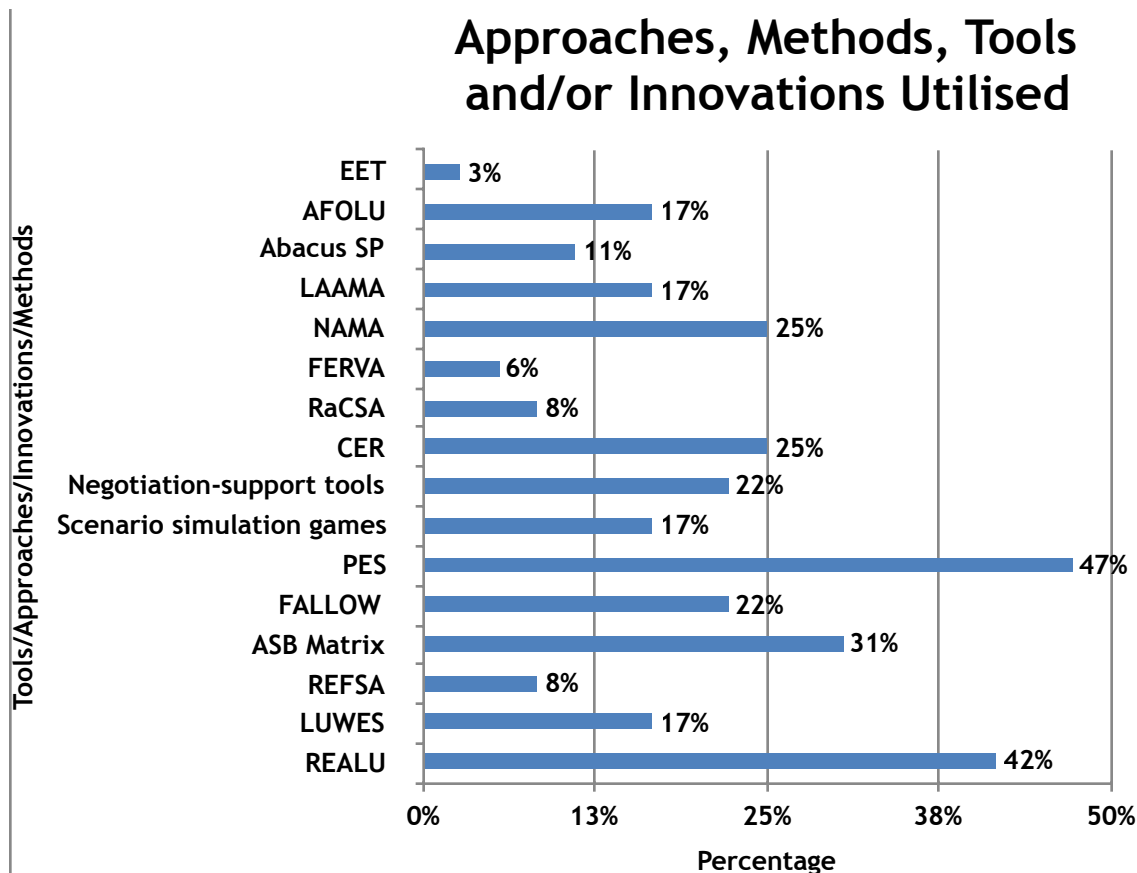


Figure 1.5 - Approaches, Methods, Tools and/or Innovations Utilized

Recommendations

Of the 33 who responded to this question, 92% indicated they recommend the *ABS Policybriefs* to colleagues, partners and/or other contacts while 8% do not recommend.

Respondents were able to comment on their reasoning, which are as follows:

- It depends on the topic (if relevant) x 3
- Very helpful/useful/concise x 3
- They are topical & brief
- It may help in maintaining sustainability and encourage economic growth without compromising the environment
- These research briefs are especially good for people that do not have time to read a detailed scientific literature. You may not want to read several long articles from relatively obscure scientific journals. But these briefs can give you a quick summary

- ASB Policybriefs explain new insight by reliable evidence
- Some of the baseline information is interesting
- Understandable and easy to read with scientific basis
- I am a financial employee and recommend this page to my colleagues so they can learn more about conservation issues on forests matter
- They are informative on forestry policy, market and institutional issues
- I recommend to fellow students
- Occasionally it is useful when introducing a layman to the complexities

Comments & Suggestions

Respondents were asked to provide any suggestions or comments regarding their thoughts on the *ASB Policybriefs* particularly if there were any topics they would like to see explored. The responses are as follows:

- Financial and trademarkets (project figures, budgets, key indicators) x 4
- You may produce short and attractive alerts that invite me to read new issues of ASB Policybrief
- More on policy
- Add an office in Peru, so we can participate in these efforts/strategies
- Inland Fisheries
- Smallholder field to market and distribution
- Decision making frameworks such as the Cynefin model
- Impact assessment
- ICTs and forestry; mechanization; apiculture; weed control; pest control; biodiversity in forest plantations; natural (herbal) medicine
- The policy brief is somewhat too technical to be understood by policy makers

4. Discussion

Although the survey results only capture a small sample, it does provide insight into the target audience perceptions as well as how the *Policybriefs* are utilized and its beneficial contributions for the ASB Network. Thus, the survey data provides some interesting information on the potential outcomes from the *Policybriefs* as it focuses on the descriptive performance levels of salience, credibility and legitimacy.

Audience & Frequency

The survey data represents a varied audience group with the majority of recipients as researchers, similar to the representation of the *2006 External Review*. There was a lack of response from local people and/or donors. Therefore, the ability to measure the impacts particularly on the policy arena is limited.

As it was noted that the *Briefs* are published at a rate of 2 per month, it is significant that several respondents read the *Briefs* regularly and at a monthly/bi-monthly frequency; although, some respondents indicated there occasional or infrequent reading. Also to highlight, is the range of work locations for the audience particular to Seychelles and New Zealand, which includes non-tropical areas such as Japan and Morocco. Therefore, the *Policy Series* is reaching a larger audience group implying that the wide communication strategy objective is being met.

However, by the small number of responses to the listserv, is it possible to assume that people aren't reading their newsletter emails especially with the below comment:

I don't think I've read one before but looked at them when I got an email asking me to take this survey. I will read them regularly now because they look excellent.

Therefore, with the low response rate as well as the occasional reading from some of the participants, the communications strategy may be questionable and in need of improvement especially since the main objective of the *Brief* series is to build awareness. In addition, the lack of policy advisor and local partner participation limits the impact of the *Brief Series*.

Salience

The *Policybriefs* are certainly addressing key issues in the debates between communities' and livelihoods and conservation at the tropical forest margin. In general, respondents noted the *Briefs* to be very topical and useful toward the discussion on sustainability issues with encouraging economic growth. And the survey data in particular show the multitude of benefits contributed from the *Policybrief Series*.

Furthermore, in relation to the concerns expressed in the literature with measuring impact of the *Briefs* especially with its aim to reduce poverty and conserve the environment, the survey results convey that more than half of the respondents have benefitted from the *Briefs* in helping to improve the livelihood of the poor as well as decreasing deforestation, increasing carbon storage and defining spatial boundaries.

A topical area that audience members would like to see more of is the financial sectors particularly to trade markets. This would be significant to the policy arena as they often focus on economic aspects and financial growth. Also suggested was more research on forestry policy, institutional issues and decision making frameworks. It was noted in the literature that since 2007, most ASB outputs focused on information dissemination and public awareness rather than specific policy changes. By 2009, the ICRAF coordination office underwent a transition period that allocated more focus on the REDD+ and AFOLU programs, which do have more a financial foundation. Therefore, ICRAF should continue their attention on these sectors.

One suggestion, which is supported by the literature, is the need to target the smallholder market through a focus on specific distribution of information. But this is perhaps the dilemma ASB has in that they only have so much capacity to implement change in the field, and as a research institute they are only able to provide a certain level of communication. The literature suggests that in the past, the ASB was not being proactive and not strategically delivered to some relevant decision makers, especially those at the local and regional levels. It can be assumed from this survey that these performance indicators are still not being met.

Credibility

As Policy Briefs attempt to paint a picture that is easy to follow and by providing lessons learned from experience, the survey results support this objective. The data presents high satisfaction ratings, which highlights the credibility of the *Policybriefs* to provide sufficient scientific evidence particular with reliable evidence that is understandable, easy to read and good for people that do not have time to read a detailed scientific literature, (which can be quite useful and marketable to policymakers). Other comments expressed the *Briefs* as very helpful, useful and concise as well as topical and brief. Yet, one respondent commented that the *Policybriefs* are often ‘too technical to be understood by policy makers’, which suggests an issue with the communication strategy and outreach. It seems that there continues to be a gap between policy makers, research and the communication.

It is important to note that more than a third were only “somewhat satisfied” with the *Policybriefs* being able to provide effective strategies that are implementable and references to other scientific material. This is significant as one of the main objectives of the *Briefs* is to inspire action and if particular approaches/tools/research strategies are difficult to implement, then the objectives are not being met.

All respondents, and for a very small sample, indicated at least one tool or methods that they utilized, which adds to the credibility (as well as salience and legitimacy) of the *Briefs*. Specifically, with PES and REALU being the most used, this conveys the importance of financial mechanisms and carbon emissions/climate change aspects in the participants work agenda.

Legitimacy

It can be concluded from the survey results that the *Policybriefs* are meeting the needs and are respectful of the audience agenda particularly as more than half noted that key findings/implications that are applicable to work agenda, which supports the legitimacy of the ASB

Series. The range of themes and topics recognized in the *Briefs* during literature review, were fully represented within the small sample of survey participants. Such key objectives in are market land-use/natural resource management, climate change mitigation/adaptation strategies, REDD/Carbon markets, sustainable (green) development and ecosystem services. Plus, the benefits provided from the *Briefs* is supported by that data (e.g. providing tools and scientific methods to empower local communities, building shared understanding to improve land-use planning with a diverse range of actors, defining boundaries and mapping forest areas to improve spatial awareness, etc).

Important to note is that the majority of respondents indicated NA for receiving any benefits from ‘better access to investments/credit for smallholder farmers’ and ‘improving market accessibility for non-forest timber and/or non-timber products’. It appears that this type of work is under represented by the sample group.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey data supports the legitimacy, credibility and salience of the *ASB Policybrief Series*. Respondents were more than satisfied with many aspects of the Briefs and benefitted in a multitude of forms. The results provide a small glimpse into the ASB Network particular to the work agenda and the contributions of the *Policybriefs*. It is important to mention that the small response from the government and policy sector limits the overall performance level of the *Policybriefs* key objectives, which is to bridge the gap between research and policy through its communication strategy and awareness building focus.

5. Conclusions

The ASB Partnership aims to bridge knowledge with action through affective and scientifically proven strategies. It also strives to inform the global debate on sustainability issues at the tropical forest-agriculture margins. As a research institute, it is important that ICRAF evaluate its program and understand who the *ASB Policybriefs* reach, the levels of impact and the attributed outcomes in order to measure their efforts. For this reason, it is important to measure the influence of the *ASB Policybriefs* in addressing key issues between livelihoods and conservation, providing credible scientific evidence and whether it is sufficient in meeting the agenda of its target audience.

This study utilized both a literature review and a qualitative online survey targeting its Network members. Past reviews of the ASB concluded that there were considerable outputs that were directed toward research institutions and development sectors, but more outreach and communication was needed to specific target audiences (i.e. policy makers) in order to make a significant impact. Yet, they acknowledged the difficulties in measuring these aspects.

Overall, the data received from this online survey study does present some important characteristics of the target audience. The results also show the multitude of benefits, the high satisfaction ratings and the many tools/approaches utilized from the *Briefs*. These outcomes support the measured qualities of salience, credibility and legitimacy exemplifying the *ASB Policybrief Series* as a suitable communications approach as well as a tool for awareness bridging although limiting in the government and policy sector.

Recommendations and Future Work

In support of the literature, it is highly recommended that more attention be placed on communication strategies and outreach initiatives to assure that the technology and policy reform outputs produced are being targeted to appropriate audiences beyond the immediate circle of ASB research community.

As the literature argues that an important component of the ASB Programs Strategy needs to track and target the performance of the *Policybriefs* to translate research results into action (new technologies and policy reforms); the concluding argument of this Evaluation, therefore, suggests the continuance of this survey methodology, with necessary updates and revisions to the questionnaire, in order to measure the impacts of the *ASB Policybriefs* with the hope for a better response rate.

Limitations

Although the survey data illustrates the target audience perceptions with benefits received, satisfaction levels and tools/approaches used, the response rate and small sample size limits this study in its ability to make a conclusive analysis about the target audience impact. Also, as mentioned, the study was unable to conduct interviews with neither the ASB Internal Staff nor any target audience members due to time restrictions.

¹ <http://www.asb.cgiar.org/>

² <http://www.fao.org/wairdocs/tac/x5784e/x5784e07.htm>
http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Tools_and_Training/Documents/how-to-write-a-policy-brief.pdf

³ Partnership in the tropical forest margins: a 20-year journey in search of Alternatives to Slash-and-burn. Eds. P. Minang, M. van Noordwijk, E. Kahurani. ICRAF 2014

⁴ http://www.rhsupplies.org/fileadmin/user_upload/toolkit/B_Advocacy_for_RHS/Guidelines_for_Writing_a_Policy_Brief.pdf

⁵ ASB Policy Brief #1 (2001)

⁶ ASB Policy Brief #19, 2010

⁷ Liu, S. (2004). Strategic Typology of Impact Pathways for Natural Resource Management: A Case Study of the Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn Programme

⁸ Tomich, T. Report of the External Review of the Systemwide program on Alternatives to Slash and burn (ASB). CGIAR Science Council (2006) CGIAR Research Strategies for IPG in a Context of IPR. Rome, Italy: Science Council Secretariat

⁹ <http://www.cgiar.org/consortium-news/cgiar-consortium-2013-reflections-and-2014-outlook-a-mid-term-review-for-the-new-billion-cgiar-2/>